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FM AMEMBASSY DHAKA

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9261

INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE

RUEHBK/AMEMBASSY BANGKOK 8596

RUEHJA/AMEMBASSY JAKARTA 0288

RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 2157

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RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC

RUEKDIA/Joint STAFF WASHDC

S E C R E T DHAKA 000763

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR SCA/INSB, SCA/FO, AND EAP/MLS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/03/2019

TAGS: PREL PINR MARR MASS PGOV BG BM

SUBJECT: BANGLADESH CONCERNED BY POSSIBLE BURMESE MILITARY ACTION IN DISPUTED MARITIME ZONE

REF: A. 08 DHAKA 1147

1B. IIR 6 925 0146 09

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Nicholas Dean. Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

SUMMARY

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11. (S) Bangladesh's armed forces assess that Burma is considering military action to coincide with the November anniversary of the maritime confrontation between the two countries in the disputed zone of the Bay of Bengal. To prepare for this contingency, the Bangladeshi military is redeploying forces and placing units on a state of higher alert. The three service chiefs are preparing a briefing for the Prime Minister on the Burmese threat and Bangladesh's possible response. Bangladesh will likely seek U.S. support in deterring or responding to possible Burmese aggression.

Prime Minister's Security Advisor Sounds Alarm on Burma

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12. (S) During an August 3 meeting with DCM and POLOFF, Prime Minister's Security Advisor Major General (ret) Tarique Ahmed Siddique expressed concern about the possibility of hostilities with Burma related to the ongoing maritime boundary dispute. Tarique confided that he had recently been briefed by Bangladesh's Defense Advisor in Burma, who assessed that the Burmese were planning military action. According to Tarique, the recent decision to withdraw a Bangladeshi Army Brigade from the Chittagong Hill Tracts was intended, in part, to free up these forces to prepare to respond to Burmese aggression.

13. (S) According to Tarique, the GOB assessed that Burma had significantly upgraded both its air and naval forces since last fall's maritime confrontation in the Bay of Bengal. As a result, Bangladesh now assessed that Burma had an edge in air combat capability (specifically related to its MIG-29s but also including air defense systems) and also was catching up in the naval arena. Tarique said that the Burmese had been able to upgrade this capability thanks to support from the Chinese, who were motivated by a desire to gain access to energy resources from Burma. Tarique requested U.S. assistance in deterring the Burmese. He told us Bangladesh's three service chiefs were preparing a briefing for the Prime Minister related to the Burmese threat.

Others Share Similar Concerns

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¶4. (S) During an August 1 discussion with POLOFF, Chief of Army Staff General Abdul Mubin also expressed concerns about Burmese intentions. Recalling the November 2008 standoff between Bangladeshi and Burmese naval forces, Mubin confided that senior GOB leaders had been very concerned at the time about the possibility of armed conflict between the two countries. Fearing that such a conflict would have forced a delay in Bangladesh's December 2008 national elections, the Chief Adviser and Army Chief had ordered military units to avoid an exchange of fire. In Mubin's assessment, the Burmese had been humiliated by the need to back down and withdraw an exploration rig from the disputed waters in the Bay. He feared that the Burmese would seek revenge to coincide with the anniversary of the confrontation. Recent DAO (ref b) and GRPO reporting echo Mubin's concerns.

Comment

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¶5. (S) During the November 2008 maritime confrontation and in the ensuing months, the Bangladesh Army was concerned about the potential for an escalation of the conflict with Burma. At that time, the GOB requested U.S assistance with assessing Burmese intentions, including seeking imagery of Burmese military installations. We anticipate that Bangladesh may request similar assistance in this instance.

MORIARTY